

On behalf of the Parish Council

Response to Examiner's question re Policy Env1: further elaboration

Our proposal with regard to the additional area of separation to the west (shown in Figure 5, page 31, Policy ENV1) is based mainly on two factors:

The first of which concerns a matter of continuous principle in successive Local Plans - both existing and emerging Local Plan policies define areas of separation, the detail of which policies express the principle that the village of Great Bowden should remain distinct and largely separate, physically and visually, from Market Harborough now and into the future.

Policy GD6 of the in-force Local Plan, 2011 - 2031:

Policy GD6 focuses on maintaining separation in two areas where there are specific development pressures and local community concerns over the potential loss of settlement identity. The Great Bowden/ Market Harborough Area of Separation seeks to retain the identity of Great Bowden and prevent coalescence with Market Harborough.

and Policy DS04 Preserving and Enhancing our Heritage and Rural Character (Proposed Submission Local Plan, 2020 - 2041) section 2 of which policy states:

To maintain the distinctiveness of settlements and prevent the merging of these, Areas of Separation, as defined on the Policies Map, have been identified. Development in Areas of Separation must avoid coalescence and preserve the existing visual and physical separation between: a) Great Bowden and Market Harborough; ...

Thus the principle of maintaining separation between Great Bowden and Market Harborough has been continuous since 2011.

The second factor concerns the strong pressure from residents to use our every effort to support, improve and extend the above noted 'separation' policies in the light of HDC's strategic housing Policy SA03 North of Market Harborough. Specifically the allocations MH1 (250 homes) and MH2 (approx 850 homes). These developments have the potential (if approved at Inspection) to impact both visually and physically the western boundary of the Parish.

Without a designated area of separation between the canal and the western settlement edge, villagers and the Qualifying Body are convinced that development MH2, when built-out, will give a sense of continuous ribbon-development from the B6047 along Leicester Lane to the very centre of our village. Thus nullifying HDC's founding principle of preventing visual and physical coalescence between Great Bowden and the ever-expanding Market Harborough.

Those two factors underpin the inclusion of the additional area of separation to the west in our Neighbourhood Plan Review. Also, our deliberations were informed by the findings of the latest policy reviews supporting the preparation of the emerging, now submitted, Local Plan 2020 - 2041:

Areas of Separation, Review of existing and potential areas by Land Use Consultants (LUC), November 2024.

[\[https://www.harborough.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/8784/area_of_separation_study.pdf\]](https://www.harborough.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/8784/area_of_separation_study.pdf)

See page 45/46: "**A.44** The canal and adjacent tree cover would maintain a strong boundary along the edge of the allocation site but proximity to the western edge of Great Bowden, linked by Leicester Lane, would nonetheless be likely to create some sense of Great Bowden becoming contained on two sides by Market Harborough. An extension of the existing AoS west to the canal and north of Leicester Lane would serve to prevent any erosion of the remaining gap in this area.

There is a strong desire within the community to preserve and enhance our open rural setting and its heritage, thus we noted and were informed by:

Landscape Character Assessment Aug 2024 (see Landscape Character Type 7: River Valley Flood plain, Landscape Character Area 7a: Great Bowden to Welham

[\[https://www.harborough.gov.uk/downloads/download/1690/landscape_character_assessment\]](https://www.harborough.gov.uk/downloads/download/1690/landscape_character_assessment)

See for example some of the key characteristics for 7a - experienced in the fields adjoining Leicester Lane, such as:

- Fields are primarily planned enclosure with some examples of ridge and furrow and clustered cultural heritage designations within villages which contribute to a sense of time-depth.
- A strong rural character with a sense of openness due the broadly flat landscape and limited woodland, with occasional pockets of enclosure within settlement.
- Expansive views across the river valley bottom and towards the slopes of the Welland Valley punctuated by church spires; and

further informed by the findings in the *Landscape Sensitivity Assessment*, Dec 2024 [\[https://www.harborough.gov.uk/downloads/download/1692/landscape_sensitivity_assessment\]](https://www.harborough.gov.uk/downloads/download/1692/landscape_sensitivity_assessment)

Latterly, our attention was drawn to one of the latest reports in HDC's Examination Library: *TPC-NLP 11: Green Wedges, Areas of Separation and Landscape Topic Paper*, March 2026.

[\[https://www.harborough.gov.uk/downloads/file/9415/green_wedge_areas_of_separation_and_landscape_topic_paper_march_2026\]](https://www.harborough.gov.uk/downloads/file/9415/green_wedge_areas_of_separation_and_landscape_topic_paper_march_2026)

In many ways this paper supports our reasoning re the inclusion of the additional westward separation land; for example, page 6 of the paper:

"The primary function of Areas of Separation is focussed on the prevention of settlement coalescence unlike Green Wedges which have a broader remit. However, their primarily open undeveloped character means they can provide multiple benefits for their local communities, the natural environment and nearby heritage assets. As part of preparing the Local Plan, it is important that Area of Separation boundaries remain relevant and allow for sustainable development."

Additionally the report recognises on page 11 Great Bowden's ambition to include a further westward area of separation in the Neighbourhood Plan Review:

Great Bowden and Market Harborough Area of Separation

6.21 The Great Bowden/Market Harborough Area of Separation remains unchanged in the new Local Plan under Policy DS04. It straddles Market Harborough (unparished), the district's largest town, and Great Bowden parish to the north east of the town. Both settlements experience high development pressures, and the need to retain Great Bowden's separate identity is a local concern as expressed in the village's Neighbourhood Plan.

6.22 The proposed cluster of site allocations (forming SA03 North of Market Harborough) lies outside the Area of Separation but relatively close to the western edge of Great Bowden. While no change is made to the strategic scale Area of Separation, the assessment indicates that there could be scope to extend it between the western edge of Great Bowden and the Grand Union Canal (also a Conservation Area). This is being taken forward in the review of Great Bowden Neighbourhood Plan.

To conclude, in common with HDC's own 'separation land' policy, GBNP Policy ENV1 allows for appropriate sustainable development:

POLICY ENV 1: AREAS OF SEPARATION – *Development in the Areas of Separation (figure 5) will be permitted where it would not compromise, either alone or in conjunction with other existing or proposed*

development, the effectiveness of the Area of Separation in protecting the separate identity and distinctiveness of Great Bowden.

Finally, the Parish Council acknowledges its commitment to HDC's Strategic Housing land allocations for Great Bowden as laid down in made Local Plans; it is committed to sustainable development within the Parish in accordance with National Guidance, HDC's updated Strategic Policies and the Policies and supporting documents of its own made Neighbourhood Plans; it is also mindful of HDC's Development Management guidance and of applicable 'master plans'.

Ends 16.5.26